



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

December 10, 2003

Mr. Ken Dahlstedt, Chair
Skagit County Board of Health
Room 202
2nd Floor, Administration Building
700 S. Second Avenue
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Dear Chair Dahlstedt:

Thank you and the other members of your Board of Health for allowing Don Sloma and me to come before you at your September meeting to learn more about health concerns in Skagit County. Given the challenges all of us in government are facing these days, it was a very encouraging opening our meeting to hear Commissioner Anderson say public health is a top priority among citizens there. But I agree with Commissioner Monks that despite its high priority, many do not have a clear picture of the specific policies, programs, and scope of public health.

I agree with your message to us that a lack of adequate, stable funding is perhaps the largest single public health challenge we face. I think this problem is related to Commissioner Monk's concern: if citizens do not know what public health does, how easily will they support funds for it? This is why I will not only take your message back to the State Board, I will use it to strengthen my continuing efforts to encourage public health professionals and the citizens helped by them to speak out frequently, loudly, and clearly about the critical assistance they have received through public health agencies. I was gratified to see in our discussion that you share my goal that every citizen of this state should know that public health is always working for a safer and healthier Washington.

I appreciated your concern about the safety of our increasingly international food supply. I believe your ideas about tracking and labeling deserve further consideration. These issues are one more reason to encourage local use of locally grown food. As you may know, the State Board is fortunate to have Carl Osaki, a nationally known food safety expert, among our members. He is the lead on many of these issues for the Board. I have spoken with him of your concern and involvement through NACCHO. I will ask Board staff to explore any possibilities of on going collaboration between the two of you.

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Peter Browning raised several important questions in his words with us both at the public hearing and in our informal conversation afterward. I will take back the ideas he shared about some new forms for statewide risk and cost sharing on conditions like tuberculosis that require local response, but that respect no county borders. I am sure you know you are very fortunate to have someone like Peter who is stretching your resources to help sort through issues of medical care and healthy aging for seniors, access to medical care for your growing migrant populations, needed dental care and more. I think it is a sad commentary on public priorities these days that these vital programs have been cut back with their clients left to the good graces and creativity of already overburdened public health departments even as some suggest further reductions in public spending.

Our meeting was very helpful to our ongoing efforts to learn more about community perspectives on public health issues. As I mentioned during our discussion, we intend to use the information we received from you and other boards of health in our 2004 State Health Report. By law, the State Board of Health must produce this report biennial, together with recommendations for state health priorities for the ensuing biennium. You may see the 2002 State Health Report at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/Pubs/2002SHR.pdf>

If you would like to provide additional information, other community perspectives or suggestions for statewide health priorities, please feel free to call or write. There is always room for more good input.

If you have any further questions or requests, please call the Board office at (360) 236-4110 and one of our staff would be happy to assist you in anyway possible.

Again, thank you for allowing us some time with you in your busy schedules.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Carolyn Edmonds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carolyn" being more prominent than the last name "Edmonds".

Carolyn Edmonds, Member
Washington State Board of Health

cc: Peter Browning
State Board of Health Members